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ABSTRACT

Noting that while high school students have received instruction in reading and writing, few have received any instruction in speaking and listening skills, this document advocates a greater recognition of the need for a more realistic balance of instruction in the four communication areas than has traditionally been the case. Sections of the paper discuss (1) the need for increased oral and listening skills as seen by the private sector, (2) requisite oral communication competencies for curriculum planning, (3) a variety of approaches with which schools meet students' needs for speaking and listening skills, and (4) the English classroom as agent for teaching such skills, including specific strategies. A chart of speaking and listening competencies and their uses in adult life is included, as is a list of additional resource materials. (HTH)

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Speaking/Listening: Much Used, Little Taught

NAASP Curriculum Report; Volume 14 Number 2 December 1984

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Vol. 14 No. 2 December 1984

Speaking/Listening: Much Used, Little Taught

Communication instruction in most secondary schools focuses almost entirely on reading and writing, with little attention given to the development of competence in speaking and listening. But of the four means of verbal communication the speaking/listening pair is by far the most widely employed. Studies have shown that in adult life *a person is at least three times more likely to exchange meaningful information with others by speaking than by writing.*

Most high school teachers assume students have been taught how to read. A similar assumption is generally made about students' training in writing.

In contrast, when teachers attempt to communicate orally with their students — giving an assignment, engaging in group discussion, giving a lecture, explaining a scientific process, asking a question — they *cannot assume that the young people involved have had any significant instruction to improve speaking and listening skills.*

The frequency with which teachers ask, "Didn't you understand the question?" is one bit of evidence that students' listening abilities may not be sufficiently developed. Further, many high school students exhibit only limited ability to speak in appropriate and effective ways.

There is, of course, a long and honorable history of speech education for formal purposes: required declamations, debating, and public speaking, for instance, date back to the beginning of secondary education in this country. It must be noted, though, that in such exercises listening plays a lesser role. And *the competencies these activities are designed to promote are only distantly related to the many circumstances of everyday life that require the ability to speak and listen effectively.*

The foregoing comments must not be interpreted as diminishing the value of formal, forensic-type language learning experiences for high school students. They provide a wide range of values and develop language and other abilities of lasting worth.

The main point of this *Curriculum Report* discussion, however, is that there must be greater recognition of the *need for a more realistic balance of instruction in the four communication vehicles* than has traditionally been the case, which means that in basic skills courses and elsewhere the emphasis on *listening for receiving messages* and *speaking for sending messages* should be increased substantially.

The Public Speaks About Oral Communication

There are and always have been individual teachers, departmental groups, and entire schools that have given thoughtful and organized attention to helping young people develop oral communication skills which relate to the realities of day-to-day living. Their number seems certain to increase in response to urgings from many directions, as these few instances illustrate.

- Kenneth M. Frawley, an *executive of the New York Telephone Co.*, said in a speech on April 6, 1981:

  > Poor listening costs business somewhere between one and two-and-one-half billion dollars a year. Approximately 200,000,000 phone calls are made daily, but only 1 person in 10 is a good listener.

- In "The Common Goals of Michigan Education," the *report of a task force of citizens and educators:*

  > Michigan education must assure the acquisition of basic communication, computation, and inquiry skills to the fullest extent possible for each student. These basic skills fall into four broad categories: (1) the *ability to comprehend ideas through reading and listening;* (2) the *ability to communicate ideas* through writing and speaking . . . . (emphasis added.)

- In a *national advertising campaign* of the Sperry Corporation:

  > Urge your local school to teach listening — a necessity in today's world.

- From a commencement address by Warren Christopher, a *diplomat,* at Stanford University in June 1981:

  > I propose to invite your attention to a practice — a simple practice — but one of such importance that I raise it to the stature of a principle. The practice is talking. It is communication. I speak of it here primarily as a tool of foreign

policy. It is no less vital, however, in other aspects of our lives . . . . Talking also includes listening. In my experience, listening may be the secret weapon.

- In *legislation* from Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Public Law 95-561, Nov. 1, 1978:

  . . . for elementary and secondary education to improve instruction so that all children are able to master the basic skills of reading, mathematics, and *effective communication, both written and oral.* (Emphasis added.)

- In "A Nation at Risk":

  The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to . . . listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently.

- In *another national report,* "High School: Report on Secondary Education in America," Ernest L. Boyer wrote:

  The advent of the information age raises to new levels of urgency the need for all students to be effective in their use of the written and spoken word.

  The one-semester speech course we propose would include group discussion, formal debate, public speaking, and reading literature aloud . . . Listening should be included, too. Today's young people are bombarded by messages. They should be taught to evaluate what they hear, to understand how ideas can be clarified or distorted, and to explore the accuracy and reliability of an oral message.

Requisite Oral Communication Competencies

Usable curriculum design requires specifics, not generalities like "instruction in speech and listening." Different groups have defined the basics in different ways. Common to all, however, is the view that both speaking and listening are processes that require performance skills and a knowledge of why certain choices enhance communication. The recommendations of the Speech Communication Association (SCA) summarize the various positions.

In 1978, the Speech Communication Association published the report of its Task Force on Minimal Speaking and Listening Competencies for High School Graduates. Drawing on research studies of adult needs, the study group concluded that adults use speaking and listening skills for three main purposes: *occupational, citizenship,* and *personal maintenance.* The task force identified 19 speaking and listening competencies it considered basic to successful performance in those three areas, and gave an example of the application of each, as shown in the chart on pages 3 and 4.

Beyond these competencies that seem essential for *all* young people are more specialized oral communication skills a high school ought to address for *some* of its students, notably those who anticipate continuing their formal education beyond the twelfth grade.

In *Academic Preparation for College,* the College Board examines four academic competencies essential

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for success in college, of which speaking and listening are two. Of speaking and listening, the discussion says that at the college level it is essential that the student has:

- The ability to engage critically and constructively in the exchange of ideas, particularly during class discussions and conferences with instructors.
- The ability to answer and ask questions coherently and concisely, and to follow instructions.
- The ability to identify and comprehend the main and subordinate ideas in lectures and discussions, and to report accurately what others have said.
- The ability to conceive and develop ideas about a topic for the purpose of speaking to a group; to choose and organize related ideas; to present them clearly in standard English; and to evaluate similar presentations by others.

At another point the competencies basic to academic success in post-secondary studies are described in this way:

- The ability to engage in discussion as both speaker and listener — interpreting, analyzing, and summarizing.
- The ability to contribute to classroom discussions in a way that is really understood by listeners — that is, succinctly and to the point.
- The ability to present an opinion persuasively.
- The ability to recognize the intention of a speaker and to be aware of the techniques a speaker is using to affect an audience.
- The ability to recognize and take notes on important points in lectures and discussions.
- The ability to question inconsistency in logic and to separate facts from opinion.

■ Serving Many Needs and *Interests*

Schools take a variety of approaches to helping their students develop competencies such as those listed above. It is possible to locate high schools which offer neither speech courses nor speech units in other courses. On the other hand, there are schools that offer

Speaking and Listening Competencies

Competency	Occupational	Citizenship	Maintenance
1. Listen effectively to spoken English.	Understand directions given by job supervisor.	Understand directions to a jury from a judge.	Understand a doctor's directions for taking prescribed medicine.
2. Use words, pronunciation, and grammar appropriate for situation.	Use appropriate language during employment interviews.	Use language understood by public officials.	Use language understood by a police officer when making a complaint.
3. Use nonverbal signs appropriate for the situation.	Use gestures which aid a coworker in learning to perform a production task.	Use appropriate facial expressions and posture when expressing your point of view at civic meetings.	Use nonverbal signs to indicate sympathy to a friend.
4. Use voice effectively.	Use appropriate volume when conversing with a customer via telephone.	Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard and understood when giving testimony in court.	Speak with appropriate rate, volume, and clarity when reporting a fire or accident.
5. Identify main ideas in messages.	Recognize performance standards for work assigned orally.	Select main ideas when listening to political speeches.	Identify main ideas in broadcast messages about tax return preparation.
6. Distinguish facts from opinions.	Distinguish between facts and opinions in customer complaints.	Distinguish between fact and opinion in newscasts.	Distinguish facts from opinions in advertisements.
7. Distinguish between informative and persuasive messages.	Distinguish between informative and persuasive messages of management.	Identify when being subjected to propaganda.	Distinguish between informative and persuasive messages about nonprescription drugs.
8. Recognize when another does not understand your message.	Recognize when a customer does not understand your directions for product use.	Recognize when a public official does not understand your request.	Recognize when another family member does not understand your instructions.
9. Express ideas clearly and concisely.	Explain job requirements to a new employee.	Describe an accident or crime to a police officer.	Explain appliance malfunction to a repair person.
10. Express and defend with evidence your point of view.	Express and defend your reasons for job absence to your supervisor.	Express and defend your position in a city council meeting.	Express and defend your feelings in a family discussion.
11. Organize (order) messages so that others can understand them.	Use a problem-cause-solution order when making a suggestion to a supervisor.	Use chronological order to explain your complaint to an elected official.	Explain to your child how to prevent accidents using a cause-effect order.
12. Ask questions to obtain information.	Obtain suggestions about how to improve your job performance.	Obtain information from public officials about laws and regulations	Obtain information about your credit rating.
13. Answer questions effectively.	Answer a potential employer's questions about your qualifications.	Answer questions of a census taker.	Answer a doctor's questions about an illness you have.
14. Give concise and accurate directions.	Instruct customers about product use.	Give directions to another about the procedures necessary to vote.	Teach your child what to do in case of fire.
15. Summarize messages.	Summarize your qualifications in a job interview.	Summarize the position of a political candidate on a campaign issue.	Summarize a public service message on auto safety.

16. Describe another's viewpoint.	Describe the viewpoint of union officials in a contract dispute.	Describe the viewpoint of a jury member with whom you disagree.	Describe the viewpoint of your spouse when you disagree on a major decision.
17. Describe differences in opinions.	Describe differences in opinion with co-workers about work-related issues.	Describe differences in opinion in a zoning hearing.	Describe differences in opinion with your doctor regarding health care.
18. Express feelings to others.	Express satisfaction to a coworker about his or her work.	Express feelings of disapproval regarding a legislator's position on an issue.	Express feelings of approval to your child for his or her school achievement.
19. Perform social ritual.	Introduce yourself at the beginning of a job interview.	Introduce a motion at a public meeting according to correct procedure.	Introduce strangers to one another.

a *wide range of learning opportunities,* from a required course for all students, to numerous electives, to extra-curricular activities involving speaking and listening.

Following are outlines of three such wide-ranging approaches:

LIVONIA STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL, 33500 Six Mile Rd., Livonia, Mich. 48152. *Contact:* Dale Coller, Principal; George Croll, Speech Teacher.

Ninth grade students in all four district high schools *are required to take Language Arts 9,* a two-semester course in basic communication skills. Six weeks comprise the oral communication unit. Tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students must take five semesters of communication courses in specialty areas to create a basic grasp of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The district requirement for English at the high school level consists of two semesters of writing skills, two semesters in literature, and one semester in oral communication. For the oral communication requirement the students can choose among the following courses:

- *Speech* (covers the basics in a survey of speaking and listening skills)
- *Public Speaking* (an advanced course for those with competency skills or who have passed the first course and want more speaking experience)
- *Radio & Television I* (for those desiring more production experience)
- *Advanced Radio & TV* (for those desiring more production experience)
- *Debate* (elementary principles of debate; students will be able to compete in interscholastic forensics)
- *Forensics* (advanced speaking skills for those wanting to compete in individual events during winter semester — oratory, extemporaneous speaking, interpretive reading, etc.)
- *Communication and Discussion Skills* (a course concentrating on an interpersonal communication approach to help students master basic communication skills).

These options vary among the schools, depending upon the individual school's faculty and facilities. The options in this requirement reflect an adaptation to a diversified speech and drama program already in existence. The program builds a common base in the ninth grade requirement, and then creates options for the upper grades.

- Drama (covers the basic aspects of acting and elementary production)
- Advanced Dramatics (advanced skills).

FREMONT HIGH SCHOOL, Sunnyvale, Calif. 94087 *Contacts:* Jayne Martin, Principal; Carmendale Fernandes, English Department Chair

All six schools in the Fremont Union High School District offer a strong *basic skills* approach: *Every course receiving English credit for graduation must teach reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.* One semester of speech communication is required as part of the English Foundation Program. Students are required to take basic oral communication. Advanced students can substitute speech and debate.

. . . the study group concluded that adults use speaking and listening skills for three main purposes: occupational, citizenship, and personal maintenance.

Of the eight goals in the district the first is, "Each student should have the opportunity to develop fundamental communication and mathematical skills to the level of his or her ability."

Sub-goal — Each student should have the opportunity to

- 1.1 — acquire ideas through reading
- 1.2 — acquire ideas through listening
- 1.3 — acquire ideas through visual forms
- 1.4 — develop the ability to communicate ideas and feelings through writing
- 1.5 — develop the ability to communicate ideas and feelings through speaking
- 1.6 — develop the ability to correctly perform mathematical operations
- 1.7 — develop the ability to communicate ideas and feelings through visual forms
- 1.8 — develop the ability to reason logically
- 1.9 — develop the ability to recognize and evaluate evidence.

This thorough goal statement reflects the basic unity of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and computation, and the district has followed through with a strong speech requirement and course offerings to develop those skills. The last two goals are directly treated by offering the option of Speech and Debate I, II, III, and IV for the student who wants the challenge of advanced work with competitive speaking.

At the heart of any school's speaking/ listening program, whether it is comprehensive or minimal, should be a required introductory course in oral communication, preferably at the ninth grade level.

The basic oral communication course covers the basic two forms of public speaking — the speech to inform and the speech to persuade — as well as other speech formats, discussion, interpersonal communication, the interview, business contacts, parliamentary procedure, and oral reading. Attention is also paid to grammar, outlining, vocabulary, and research. Students gain practice in listening for ideas and evaluating evidence as they listen to classmates present speeches.

BURNSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL, 600 East Hwy. 13, Bloomington, Minn. 55378. *Contacts:* Howard Hall, Principal; Carlene McDowell, Speech Department.

Burnsville recently added a trimester oral communication requirement for speaking and listening competency to go along with the other basic skill requirements for writing, reading, and computation. To meet the requirement, students must choose one of the following three courses:

- *Public Speaking:* Students learn to give a variety of speeches with stress on the skills of logical support, organization, and delivery.
- *Small-Group Communication:* Students learn interpersonal communication skills which are applied in group settings while working on listening skills.
- *Business Speech:* Students learn those oral skills to help in an organizational setting where one uses parliamentary procedure, interviewing for employment and evaluation, and speaking and listening for leadership.

In addition to the basic trimester course requirement for competency, electives are offered in oral interpretation and discussion issues. Students can also gain extensive experience in drama and debate as extracurricular activities.

- *Oral Interpretation:* Students learn how to use their voice and some body movement to develop the meaning in prose, poetry, and drama.
- *Discussion Issues:* Students learn how to prepare for and use good oral skills in participating in symposium, panel discussion, and roundtable formats. The emphasis on research and public presentations makes this an advanced course.

Acting and other drama classes are offered as part of the Fine Arts Department of this school. Staff members include two full time speech teachers and two teachers who divide their duties between speech and English courses.

A fourth example of a comprehensive curriculum design is especially noteworthy because of the testing that is an integral part of its oral proficiency program, a program that began more than a decade ago at the urging of leaders of business and industry.

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL, Gary Community School Corp., Gary, Ind. 46402. *Contacts:* Robert Jones, Principal; George Comer, District Oral Proficiency Director.

Part of the oral communication program at Roosevelt High School is a requirement that all seventh and tenth grade students must successfully complete a minimum of one semester of speech instruction, and that prior to graduation all students must pass an oral proficiency examination.

The oral proficiency program (OPP) was designed for all six high schools in the district. Students must meet instructional requirements in speech education classes and demonstrate a minimal oral competency.

Usable curriculum design requires specifics, not generalities like "instruction in speech and listening."

The required proficiency examination is administered at the end of the tenth grade so there is time for remedial work with those students who need it. The consequences of this follow-up plan are shown by the statistics for one three-year period: In 1978-79, 31 percent of the tenth grade students taking the test did not

The 10 oral objectives identified by a systemwide committee of speech, English, and language arts teachers and administrators are:

- Articulation — to speak clearly, distinctly, and fluently
- Pronunciation — to utter words correctly
- Word usage — to use words according to standard usage
- Content — to present information which logically explains, supports, and/or illustrates expressed ideas or statements
- Sentence structure — to speak in complete sentences
- Verbal utterances — to speak without the use of non-meaningful verbal crutches
- Volume — to speak loudly enough to be heard
- Rate — to speak at a rate that can be understood
- Vocal quality — to speak in a natural voice
- Eye contact — to establish eye contact with the interviewer.

. . . listening involves ***the assigning of meaning*** *by understanding and/or interpreting the oral stimuli heard.*

pass; a year later, 85 percent of those who failed the year before passed; and finally, in 1979-80, only 3 percent remained who could not pass the examination after repeated remediation.

■ Focusing on Common Needs

At the heart of any school's speaking/listening program, whether it is comprehensive or minimal, should be a required introductory course in oral communication, preferably at the ninth grade level. This course should provide a basic survey of the speaking and listening competencies all young people ought to acquire. To meet the basic-skills expectation, the course should include an oral-skills performance test and follow-up such as that used in Gary.

In *High School: Report on Secondary Education in America,* Ernest L. Boyer wrote that "the high school curriculum should also include a study of the spoken word," and noted that in our verbal culture "we speak more than we write."

Boyer says:

- The one-semester speech course we propose would include group discussion, formal debate, public speaking, and reading literature aloud. Again, the goal is not just effective self-expression; it is also to develop reflective thinking. Students' oral comments must also be accompanied by careful analysis and critiques by teachers.

A school program should provide direct and indirect listening instruction in all its varieties as a parallel to its program in speaking.

- Listening should be included, too. Today's young people are bombarded by messages. They should be taught to evaluate what they hear, to understand how ideas can be clarified or distorted, and to explore the accuracy and reliability of an oral message....

Here is an example of such a required course.

J.K. MULLEN HIGH SCHOOL, 3601 S. Lowell, Denver, Colo. 80236. *Contacts:* Brother Wayne Vigerie, Principal; Frank Sfera, Teacher.

The required ninth grade speech class at Mullen High School teaches speech and listening skills in a framework that also reinforces the learning skills basic to other subject fields. For instance, the course begins with debate, which develops note-taking competence, experience with research approaches, attention to logic, and organizational skills. Outlining, grammar, punctuation, and spelling are taught and practiced. Researching the class debate topic requires the preparation of 100 evidence cards from 25 different sources, which must include government documents, periodicals, books, and dictionaries. The cross-examination debate technique teaches the questioning skills urged by the College Board.

Studying parliamentary procedure in the speech class precedes the Model United Nations unit in social studies classes; consequently, teachers in those classes do not need to spend time helping their students learn parliamentary procedure and how to organize and support oral presentations.

During the second semester, a number of speech-related activities are introduced, including:

- Mass media is approached from the consumer point of view and also from the production angle
- Speech-making is related to the preparation and presentation of the oral book reports students must make in their English classes, and also with the business reports they may be required to make in their after-school years
- Interviewing is taught in ways that help students

prepare for the oral exams they may have to take in other school and college courses.

■ English as the Agent

Whether a school promotes the development of oral communication skills through a variety of course offerings or a single introductory course, or no course at all, the opportunity does exist to incorporate oral communication activities in all English classes. Many English teachers have been exploiting this possibility for years; however, both need and logic support the position that such integration should be *a planned and systematic element* of *all* high school English instruction, just as writing customarily is.

The English curriculum at all grade levels offers almost unlimited possibilities for building speech and listening competencies in the process of working toward other learning goals. For example:

- In reading poetry aloud
  Poetry goal: introduce a variety of authors
  Speech goal: use of voice to convey meaning
- Through informative speeches on characters
  Literature goal: character development
  Speech goal: organizing an informative speech
- In small-group discussions of a novel
  Literature goal: learning alternative ways of interpreting a theme of the story
  Speech goal: participation in a small group

Some students may listen to a lecture to comprehend the information being presented, while other students may be listening in order to evaluate the information given.

- In a readers theater treatment of a scene from a play
  Drama goal: understanding the theme
  Speech goal: developing meaning by interacting in a group
- By discussing the written work of a classmate
  Writing goal: to discover how a specific audience interprets what has been written
  Speech goal: interpersonal communication to discover meaning by an interview.

EDISON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL, 5801 Franconia Rd., Alexandria, Va. 22310. *Contact:* Virginia O'Keefe, Teacher.

In O'Keefe's English 12 class, oral communication activities are used often while working toward writing and literature objectives. O'Keefe believes that "oral communication skills cannot be developed without communicating orally." She also believes that thinking abilities are developed through the immediate testing of ideas in oral activities. Some of the strategies she uses are:

- Brainstorming in small groups to produce ideas for written assignments
- Oral reading of poetry in an interpretive fashion to reflect the ideas and emotions portrayed

. . . the opportunity does exist to incorporate oral communication activities in all English classes.

- Role-playing of a character in a short story to demonstrate understanding of the person, thus learning about use of the voice and body to express meaning
- A class debate in parliamentary fashion to argue the proposition, after reading the play, that Macbeth was insane
- Use of small groups in a round robin sequence of questions about a short story that has been read
- Having each student in a discussion answer an open-ended question that solicits an expansion of an idea
- Conducting a seminar with selected students to train them to lead the entire class in a discussion of something that has been read
- Having students respond orally to a piece of writing one student has written and read to the class
- Using the student congress format, after reading *1984*, to answer the question, "Did Winston lack moral courage?"

In the same vein, another teacher when confronted with the formidable task of motivating a class with a high percentage of weak readers to read the play, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, began with a film of the play. Then, to develop understanding he had students act out short scenes. When a group of students had completed their presentation of a scene, another group would be asked to improvise a similar but contemporary scene based on their own lives.

The film and the activities moved the class toward the English objective — an introduction to Shakespeare and drama — while at the same time contributing to the improvement of the students' oral communication skills, especially their ability to communicate meaning through voice, gesture, and body movement.

■ Now Hear This

Listening is not just hearing or attending; listening involves *the assigning of meaning* by understanding and/or interpreting the oral stimuli heard. People listen for a variety of purposes. For instance, a student may be listening to music only to enjoy the flow of the melody,

but another student listening to the same music may be doing so to observe the development of a musical theme. Some students may listen to a lecture to comprehend the information being presented, while other students may be listening in order to evaluate the information given. A school program should provide direct and indirect listening instruction in all its varieties as a parallel to its program in speaking.

Examples of courses that concentrate on the development of listening skills are not easy to find, but it is hoped that this one illustration will stimulate other schools to move in this direction.

ROBBINSDALE-COOPER HIGH SCHOOL, 8230 47th Avenue North; New Hope, Minn. 55428. *Contacts:* Elmer Kempanien, Principal; Harvey F. Weiss, Listening Teacher.

Two listening courses are available on an elective basis. "Effective Listening," which appeals to many of the non-college-bound students, combines a concern for basic theory about listening and drill activities that focus on comprehension, immediate recall, and following oral directions. Many of the college-bound students take "Listening and Note Taking." This class has three phases: note taking, which makes considerable use of audiovisual materials; listening practice where community members give presentations so that students learn how to adapt note taking to a variety of presentation styles; and drill in listening skills.

Resource Materials

Basic Oral Communication Skills: A Programmed Sequence for Illinois.

A K-12 listing of objectives, specific communication skills, and examples of activities. The sections for grades 7-9 and 10-12 are very helpful. ERIC document ED 203 417.

Development of Functional Communication Competencies, edited by B.S. Wood. Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Rd., Annandale, Va. 22003. Includes 38 exercises in listening.

Essential Speech and Listening Skills for Elementary School Students. Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Rd., Annandale, Va. 22003.

hm Study Skills Program. NASSP, 1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091. A comprehensive series of activity oriented units designed to improve such critical student skills as listening, test taking, and problem solving.

Listening Instruction. Andrew Wolvin and Carolyn Coakley. Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Rd., Annandale, Va. 22003.

Speaking and Listening Competencies for High School Graduates. Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Rd., Annandale, Va. 22003.

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